

February 2004

Dear friends,

We are pleased to present the final Report on the "Child Care and Labour – Working Together For Publicly Funded Child Care Strategy Session" held in November 2003.

This event, co-sponsored by our two organizations, marked an historic step in the relationship between the child care and labour movements. Building on our collaborative efforts over the last decade, the event provided activists from both movements with a 'safe place' to discuss some difficult and provocative questions.

The results speak for themselves. Participants left informed, energized and optimistic about what we can accomplish by working together. In the face of setbacks, cut-backs and defeats, the strategy session was positive, productive and progressive.

We know that the November event was just the beginning. Now we need to put the ideas generated at the strategy session into practice.

Some actions are already underway. The Coalition of Child Care Advocates has formally adopted a policy of promoting unionization as part of a strategy for achieving the goal of a publicly funded, not-for-profit, high quality, accessible, affordable child care system.

The Report describes an ambitious set of other actions that we have agreed to work on together leading up to the coming federal and provincial elections. We are counting on you and your organizations to be there with us every step of the way.

We would particularly like to thank the members of Community Social Services Component of the BCGEU for the financial support that made this event possible. We know how hard you work, we value your labour and we consider it a privilege to have your support. We also want to thank all the participants, speakers and volunteers who contributed their time, energy and enthusiasm.

Together, we will win a publicly funded quality child care system for Canada's children.

Sincerely,

James Cavalluzzo, Chair
Community Social Services Component
B.C. Government and Service
Employees' Union

Susan Harney, Chair
Coalition of Child Care
Advocates of BC

**COALITION OF
CHILD CARE
ADVOCATES BC**



CEP 467

CHILD CARE & LABOUR

COALITION OF
CHILD CARE
ADVOCATES BC



CEP 467

FINAL REPORT

**Child Care and Labour —
Working Together for
Publicly Funded Child Care**

Strategy Session

Saturday, November 8, 2003
Vancouver, British Columbia

Coalition of Child Care Advocates of BC

Community Social Services Component of the
BC Government and Service Employees' Union



Introduction and Background

ON NOVEMBER 7 AND 8, 2003, the Coalition of Child Care Advocates of BC (CCCABC) and the Community Social Services Component of the BC Government and Service Employees' Union (BCGEU) co-sponsored a weekend of events to help build stronger links between child care advocates and the labour movement.

The weekend began with a public panel discussion on *"How to Advance a Progressive Child Care Agenda in the Next Federal and Provincial Elections"*. Over 125 people heard comments from four eminent panelists: Libby Davies, NDP MP, Vancouver East; Susan Harney, Chair, Coalition of Child Care Advocates of BC; George Heyman, President, BC Government and Service Employees' Union; and Jamie Kass, Co-chair, Council of Child Care Advocates of Canada.

Each speaker highlighted the critical need for provincial and federal action on child care and the importance of community alliances and coalitions to promote social justice issues including child care. Webcast highlights of the panelists' comments are available on line at www.workingtv.com/childcareforum.html.

This Friday evening panel was followed by a full day invitational strategy session that brought together 45 labour activists and child care advocates from across BC.

The purpose of this strategy session was to:

- ✓ learn more from and about each other's sectors;
- ✓ explore joint strategies for organizing, bargaining and advocating;
- ✓ develop common messages for the next federal and provincial elections;
- ✓ plan for mobilizing our constituents.

The day began with an overview of the current state of child care in BC and an explanation of the child care advocacy movement. This was followed by a presentation from Jamie Kass who, in her capacity as the Child Care Coordinator for the Canadian Union of Postal Workers and a member of the Canadian Labour Congress Child Care Committee, outlined the opportunities and challenges for cooperation between labour and child care advocates in three key areas – organizing, bargaining and advocacy.



The final presentation was by Morna Ballantyne, Managing Director of National Services for the Canadian Union of Public Employees (CUPE) who presented the findings of a recent CUPE study that confirms the relationship between unionization and quality of child care.

With this shared information as a starting point, participants spent the remainder of the day in a series of small group discussions on 4 topics: Organizing, Bargaining, Advocacy Messages and Advocacy Strategies. Each participant received a package that provided 'food for thought' on topic and a set of discussion questions.



The day ended with a report back on the key messages that emerged from the very rich and provocative small group discussions (as summarized below) and responses to the identified issues and possible actions from a number of trade union leaders and representatives.

Following the strategy session, representatives of the co-sponsoring organizations met to develop a joint action plan for implementing our 'next steps' (as summarized below).

Small Group Discussion Summaries

1. Organizing

Participants were asked to consider the following questions:

1. *How do unions view the challenge of organizing child care workers?
Positively? With skepticism? Disinterested? Or? Why?*
2. *How does the BC child care workforce view unions and unionization?
Positively? With skepticism? Disinterested? Or? Why?*
3. *What opportunities exist for organizing more child care workers?*
4. *What barriers exist for organizing more child care workers?*
5. *What different or creative approaches could be used to organize child care workers? Is there a way to use organizing of child care workers to advance the advocacy agenda for publicly funded child care?*



While recognizing the value of unionization, group discussions highlighted a number of barriers to effective organizing in the child care sector, including: small bargaining units, the culture of consensus (as opposed to confrontation) in the child care sector, the inability of non-profit societies to meet bargaining demands without public funding, and concerns about recent cases where services were lost because parent fees could not cover the ‘costs’ of unionized centres.

Participants also generated ideas for organizing the sector, including: community-wide organizing drives so that unionized and non-unionized settings are not competing against each other, organizing around political demands for a publicly funded child care system, and finding ways to ‘engage’ child care workers in their unions.

The **key messages** emerging from these discussions were:

- It is worth overcoming the barriers to organize the child care sector.

In order to do this, the **trade union movement** will need to:

- ❑ make a long term commitment to organizing the sector;
- ❑ recognize the unique nature of the sector, particularly the nature of the workforce and the cooperative relationship that often exists between workers and employers (especially when parents are the employers);
- ❑ be realistic about what can be achieved – don’t promise what can’t be delivered;
- ❑ recruit and use child care workers as organizers in the sector;
- ❑ be prepared to consider new coordinated bargaining and organizing structures (see Bargaining Group discussion).

the **child care movement** will need to:

- ❑ take a clear public stand supporting unionization;
- ❑ ‘push’ the trade union movement to organize differently in child care.

“Organizing should be a priority, but we need to do it right.”



2. Bargaining

Participants were asked to consider the following questions:

1. *Given the lack of public funding for child care in BC, how can we avoid or reduce pitting the needs for better wages and benefits against parents' ability to afford or access services when bargaining for child care workers?*
2. *The Liberal government's Bill 61 expelled most child care centres from the Community Social Services Employer's Association (CSSEA). Without a central bargaining agent for child care employers, what would collective or coordinated bargaining in the sector look like? What would be needed to create better conditions for bargaining?*
3. *How can a union make bargaining gains for its child care members sustainable?*
4. *Given the relationship between unionization and quality of child care services, how can we use bargaining to improve quality?*
5. *Are there bargaining demands that non child care unions should be making to improve their members access to child care?*
6. *Are there ways in which bargaining can be used to advance the advocacy agenda for publicly funded child care?*
7. *Based on your discussions, which of these or other bargaining strategies do you think should be the priority now in BC?*

Group discussions highlighted: the problematic legacy of the 1999 Community Social Services strike in which the child care agreements were 'separated' from the rest of the sector making the gains harder to protect, the elimination of child care from the CSSEA leaving no coordinated bargaining table, and the recent set backs as a result of government's de-funding of the Munroe agreement.

The inability of child care employers to meet union demands was identified as a key barrier to successful bargaining that is not recognized in traditional bargaining approaches.

Groups discussed new approaches to bargaining including the current approach in Manitoba where workers can decertify if the union is unable to deliver a first contract. There was considerable discussion about the need for a new structure for bargaining in child care and a focus on demands related to quality care and public policy progress.



The **key messages** emerging from these discussions were:

- The child care sector needs a new kind of bargaining table that brings together employers, unions, parents and possibly non-unionized workers and advocates. This new structure would adopt principle based bargaining in which employers and employees work together on joint political action. Demands for wages, working conditions, professional development and quality could be framed within the context of making the system better - bargaining for public policy.
- There is a need for a common bargaining strategy in which all unions demand that all employers lobby the federal and provincial governments for publicly funded child care. This was described as 'uploading' whereby employers are required to be part of solving the child care crisis experienced by their employees.

3. Advocacy Messages

Participants were asked to consider the following questions:

1. *Does the long-term vision for a comprehensive child care system resonate with the public? If so – why and how? If not – why not?*
2. *Do the short-term advocacy messages adequately address the current crisis in child care?*
3. *Why have advocates' efforts to position child care as a key strategy for advancing women's equality, addressing family poverty and promoting healthy childhood development not been effective?*
4. *Why have the arguments from 'unlikely' allies that child care is a sound public investment and will increase productivity not had an impact on government policy?*
5. *Why has the public support for increased investment in the early years not translated into political support for a pan-Canadian child care system?*
6. *Based on these discussions, what are the key advocacy messages to take into the upcoming federal and provincial elections?*

Group discussions highlighted the complex set of public attitudes related to child care. While polls indicate that child care advocacy message resonate with some, this support does not appear to translate into increased public spending. Groups identified the need to



consider new messages about public investment such as 'Pay Now or Pay Later' or 'Pay Differently' rather than 'Pay More'.

Groups also considered the confusion that exists about the terminology used (Early Learning and Care, Early Childhood Development, etc.) to describe child care and other early childhood services and remaining questions about how best to position child care within the broader early childhood development agenda. The need to focus on the needs of the child rather than the labour market attachment needs of the parent was discussed.

There was also discussion about the benefits (or not) of linking child care to education.

The **key messages** emerging from these discussions were:

- Our messages need to focus on what we want, on our vision, goals and plans rather than on what we are against.
- Our messages should highlight **children's right** to quality care.
- The issue of '**quality**' resonates with parents and should be central to our messages.
- Our main message doesn't need to change but we need to get it out more widely.
- The message needs to be simplified so that it can be delivered in concise sound bites.

4. Advocacy Strategies

Participants were asked to consider the following questions:

1. *Is a diverse range of advocacy tactics still required to advance a progressive child care agenda in the current climate? Within the **advocacy** → **activist** → **resistance** continuum, where should we put most of our energy?*
2. *Is it possible to influence the provincial government's position on child care? Or, at best, can we only realistically hope to achieve a 'pause' in the dismantling of licensed child care in BC?*
3. *Could, or should, the labour movement undertake a coordinated bargaining campaign to demand that employers actively lobby the federal and provincial governments for a publicly funded child care system? If so, who should take leadership in this campaign?*



4. *What specific approaches and strategies should we adopt in the upcoming federal and provincial elections?*
5. *How can labour activists and child care advocates work together to ensure that child care is part of the broader social justice agenda?*
6. *What are the most important strategies and tactics for the child care advocacy and labour movements to pursue in partnership over the next year? What role should labour play in implementing these strategies? What role should the child care sector play in these strategies?*

Group discussions affirmed the need for a diversity of parallel tactics with ‘some form of advocacy’ for everyone. While there was considerable discussion about building a culture of resistance, groups recognized that this is difficult and complex.

Groups recognized that while the current political climate does bring people together there are concerns that child care is or will be lost in the broader social justice agenda. The role of 3rd party validators and champions was highlighted.

Groups also discussed the need to pressure employers to lobby government on child care with suggestions that paralleled ideas emerging from the discussions about bargaining.

There was also considerable discussion about the need to focus on voter registration and increased voter turn out from groups who currently do not participate in elections.

The **key messages** emerging from these discussions were:

- Despite the present political climate, we need to ‘keep on keeping on’.
- There is a need for a diverse range of advocacy tactics with increased emphasis on the **activist** → **resistance** end of the continuum.
- We will only influence government by influencing the electorate.
- Coordinated bargaining strategies are needed to pressure employers to lobby government.



Next Steps

THE COALITION OF Child Care Advocates of BC and the Community Social Services Component of the BC Government and Service Employees' Union have agreed to work together to implement the strategies and directions developed at the joint strategy session.

Actions taken to date or 'in process' include:

1. On Nov. 12, 2003 the Board of Directors of the Coalition of Child Care Advocates of BC adopted a policy to actively promote unionization as part of a strategy for achieving the goal of a publicly funded, not-for-profit, high quality, accessible, affordable child care system.
2. The Coalition of Child Care Advocates has and will continue to support the current campaigns of the Community Social Services workers of BC through its website and other communication vehicles.
3. The BCGEU will explore the possibility of piloting the cooperative bargaining approach recommended at the strategy session with one of its child care certifications and, based on the lessons learned, will consider how best to extend this approach more broadly.
4. The two organizations will develop a plan to share resources (financial and in-kind) and expertise to ensure that child care is front and centre in the upcoming federal and provincial elections.
5. The BCGEU and Coalition of Child Care Advocates will make a joint presentation to the BC Federation of Labour seeking their commitment to:
 - Convene a 'Think Tank' for organizers from a wide range of affiliates on the challenges and opportunities for organizing in the child care sector (in conjunction with the Federation's Organizing Institute).
 - Actively promote the Canadian Labour Congress' resolution that public and private sector unions call on employers to lobby the federal and provincial governments for a publicly funded child care system.
 - Include child care as a central issue in labour's federal and provincial election strategies.
 - Encourage their affiliates to join the Coalition of Child Care Advocates of BC and the Child Care Advocacy Association of Canada.